the Red Shirts to be a gang, and sometimes called them a "militia," with their strength centered in Dry Pond. Before the election, he witnessed their violence against blacks on Front Street after they had been drinking "fighting whiskey," and, as a result, he tried to stay out of the Red Shirts' path. However, because he had held political office and was seen as a minor leader within the Republican Party, Harris explained that "the night of the election they come and give me a salute of about thirty-six guns but I didn't let them know I was there." The next day, one of Harris' friends was surprised to see him alive, and the Red Shirts visited him again the next night. Harris explained that he overheard two Red Shirts complaining that northern reporters had left the city the day after the election because there was no riot. Harris heard them say that the riot would be the next day, attesting to the planned nature of the impending riot and coup. Harris concluded his explanation of the Red Shirts when he said that although the sheriff tried to arrest rowdy Red Shirts, they would be released on bail and back to their tricks within a day—"about as well to arrest the Cape Fear River as to do anything with that [Red Shirt] gang." [47]

During the campaign, the Red Shirts succeeded in intimidating many in the African American community. Nada Cotton recalled for her family that the "Red Shirt campaign was started to intimidate the negro and keep him from the polls." She remembered that the Red Shirts paraded in the streets and that "every able-bodied white was armed." An outside correspondent noted that a "great mass" of blacks were "in a state of terror amounting almost to distress." Jane Cronly observed that despite "all the abuse which has been vented upon them for months they have gone quietly on and have been almost obsequiously polite as if to ward off the persecution they seemed involuntarily to have felt to be in the air." She continued to explain that "in spite of all the goading and persecuting that has been done all summer the negroes have done nothing that could call vengeance on their heads." On the night of the election, Michael Cronly was called out in the "cold and damp for three hours" by his block commander to defend the block against a threat of fire. Cronly remarked that they all acknowledged that it was "perfect farce . . . to be out there in the damp and cold, watching for poor cowed disarmed negroes frightened to death by the threats that had been made against them and too glad to huddle in their homes and keep quiet." [48]

On the other hand, other Wilmington residents circulated unsubstantiated rumors that the blacks were organized in efforts to band together against the intimidation. On the November 7 Jim Worth informed his wife, whom he had sent out of town before the election, that he "wouldn't be greatly surprised if there should be some kind of conflict with the blacks tonight." He continued to explain that "the last two nights they were to avenge the 'red shirt' wrong of a few nights ago." He explained that "it has not as yet amounted to much except a few brickbats thrown, flourishing of a few guns and pistols and lots of talk." [49] The Wilmington papers recounted almost daily incidents of black crime portrayed as yet another means of retaliation against white aggression. Whether true or contrived by the papers, these accounts spread throughout the state and further united Wilmington whites in their resolve to combat blacks with force..[50]

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[47] *Contested Election Case*, 387-394; *Wilmington Messenger*, October 20, 1898.

[48] Jane Cronly, n.d., Cronly Papers, Duke University Library, Durham.

[49] Jim Worth to Josephine, November 7, 1898, James S. Worth Papers, Southern Historical Collection.

[50] Several news accounts and manuscript records detail blacks stealing food and claiming hunger. Perhaps as a result of a hostile environment with few